

Virginia Department of Veteran Services Town Hall Meetings

Fredericksburg Summary

The Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) conducted town hall meetings in response to Governor Kaine's Executive Order 19. This executive order directs DVS and other state agencies to improve services to the state's veterans, especially disabled veterans.

DVS identified four primary areas of focus:

1. Outreach and communication with Virginia's veterans: How can we reach veterans and what information do they need and want?
2. Quality of life for all veterans: What are the needs of veterans, especially in terms of health care, services from state government agencies, and outreach to veterans who are homeless, incarcerated, or hospitalized?
3. Workforce development: How can we ensure that employment opportunities are available to veterans and how can we ensure that the private sector has access to the veteran labor pool. What can we do to assist veteran-owned businesses?
4. Technology: How can we use technology to communicate with and deliver services to veterans?

This report summarizes the comments provided by participants attending the session held at VFW Post #3103 during the evening of March 1, 2007 in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Approximately 27 people attended the meeting including representatives from state agencies, veterans' service organizations, retired and active servicemen and women and spouses of veterans.

The session gathered information concerning:

1. What currently works well in delivering state government services to veterans and what are the best practices in place?
2. What are the critical barriers to serving veterans and what are the most important issues facing veterans?
3. Recommendations for future action to improve state government services to veterans.

The meeting was facilitated by faculty from Virginia Commonwealth University's Office of Public Policy Training.

What is Currently Working Well to meet Veteran's Needs

1. Website is great because it has the information veterans need, but not all veterans have access to the web
2. Government websites (federal) are working well to provide information
3. Military.com is useful website and provides linkages to other information
4. Transition Assistance Program (TAP) offered by the military
5. When called to duty your job is protected and pay covered, if in state government
6. Supervisor support (state government)
7. State hiring preferences for disabled veterans
8. McGuire Veterans Administration (VA) Hospital in Richmond and the VA Clinic in Fredericksburg are providing good delivery of health care services
9. The Virginia Veterans Care Center in Salem provides skilled nursing home services
10. DVS claims agents are helping process claims benefits

Critical Barriers to be Addressed

1. Not all veterans are using or familiar with how to use technology (age and cultural barriers)
2. Information is not being provided to all returning military who are just eager to get home – after 3 months home they may attend National Guard drills
3. Young veterans are not reaching out to veteran service organizations (VSOs) – need to get them involved in VFW, American Legion, etc.
4. Some veteran service representatives are overworked
5. TAP has only been in existence for 10 years so it did not cover all veterans
6. Veteran run businesses, even those by disabled veterans, are not recognized by the federal government (8A category) for special classification/set asides – state legislation is pending to provide special recognition
7. Some employers wish to employ veterans but how do we make the connection?
8. DVS Roanoke office is not responsive enough – no resolution – get word out about how to gain benefits
9. Reservists don't always get same level of services as active duty though they have many transition challenges, especially in rural areas
10. Very difficult to obtain some services, hurts civilian career because of time it takes to navigate the system
11. There is no recourse when a mental or physical health condition manifests after 90 day or 2 year timelines
12. The Commonwealth's EVA procurement system constricts veterans being able to do profitable business with the state
13. Not enough information going out concerning benefits and how to obtain them
14. Need better contact with National Guard and Reserve for family support groups

Recommendations for Action

1. Need to explore greater use of technology i.e. local TV, radio, newspaper because not everyone can use or have computers nor is it the only area of technology
2. Did not know DVS existed. Virginia National Guard website should be linked to DVS
3. Get DVS name on Army site – Military one source.com. Also 1-800-caseworker
4. 1-800 number's for older veterans – Live talk
5. Pair up military skills with civilian jobs and careers
6. Provide support groups for veterans in state employment (confidentiality important)
7. Train supervisors on how to help veterans work through problems and succeed
8. Increase outreach to businesses needed to educate supervisors on benefits of hiring veterans
9. Provide ways to document and certify military experience and training to receive college credits
10. Make it easier for disabled veterans to compete for state jobs. Federal jobs pay more so veterans are reluctant to apply. An individual may have 20 years veteran experience but might have to start at entry level in state job.
11. Provide better access to VA health care facilities – universal
12. Inform veterans about services they are eligible for through a 1-800 number linked to a central information center
13. Contact veterans who left the military before TAP – increase outreach – make TAP classes available to all veterans
14. Provide veteran benefits seminars at regular intervals (Armories, VSOs, etc.)
15. Have benefits representatives at military bases – open houses
16. Provide follow-up three to six months after veterans return through the Reserve, National Guard
17. Provide specific services through the VA for transition issues
18. Create less reliance by VA on medicating problems, especially those related to Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD)
19. Provide services in central Virginia for returning veterans that meet their needs – after work, weekends, etc. – that are more convenient to travel to
20. Create more support groups for recent returning veterans joining VSOs – reduce the generation gap
21. Change perceptions of VSOs to get younger veterans to join and participate
22. Change perception of the Virginia Employment Commission (VEC) as an “unemployment” agency – it is a career building resource
23. Provide m preference in state contracting for services for veterans
24. Conduct support group sessions in VSO facilities
25. Create stronger linkages between VSOs and DVS services
26. Have DVS track soldiers leaving active tours of duty to improve outreach by
27. Attending unit drills, etc.
28. Providing news flashes
29. Bulletin boards
30. Make 1-800 numbers available to receive information on benefits and services